

A
REVIEW
 OF THE
STATE
 OF THE
BRITISH NATION.

Saturday, August 16. 1707.

I Have had two Post Letters already, and am afraid I shall have more, if I do not answer quickly, concerning a right Arange and wonderful shower of Flies, lately falling in the Streets of London, to the surprize of the good People of the City; one of my Letters is as follows:

Mr. REVIEW,

THE most Remarkable thing has happen'd just now, as ever was known in my Memory—It is now about 7 a Clock in the Evening—for this half hour it has Rain'd Flies all over London, in a most prodigious manner; the Streets are all cover'd with them, Peoples Hats and Cloaks are all full of them; they are small Flies, about half the bigness of the ordinary sort, with thin Wings—When they lights, they don't offer to flye again, tho' their Wings are large, but crawl upon the Ground—

This Account of them is very true, 'tis not

a Minute since I have been staring at the shower, and it is not over yet; the whole City is in a surprize and admiration, and the old Women begin to predict, &c.

I am not at all for lessening the Speculations of the People, and above all, I would not displease the old Women—Prodigies and Supernatural Appearances have oftentimes carried the evident Circumstances with them, of their being signal, predicting and warning; and without doubt, the fourth Judgment of GOD, upon Pharaoh King of Egypt, had something in it Supernatural in its Manner, tho' great and sufficiently Rational Accounts may be given, of an Intermediate Cause else.

On the other hand, I am not for filling our Heads with whimsical Notions, nor alarming the People with out-side Terrors, which seldom have any other Effect, than just as the Flies had upon the King of Egypt,

to frighten him over Night, and leave him harder the next Morning.

A Shower of Flies! says one, ay, that is to signify that we should flye before our Enemies; I hope the QUEEN will send word to the Duke of Marlborough, not to fight the French, for if we do, it will be certain we shall be beaten and forc'd to flye; no, no, says another, you're just wrong; this shower of Flies is to signify Victory, that we shall flye into France, and lighting on their great and Capital City, shall lay upon it and cover it all over, just as the Flies did the City of London.

Thank you for nothing, says a third, I don't like your Prediction at all, for then we must cover Paris with our dead Bodies, and be destroy'd in the streets, for so was it with the Flies here.

O says another old Women in the North, this is but one of the ten Plagues GOD is sending upon you, for your forcing the good People of Scotland into your Power; and till you let them go again, you will be thus plagu'd—You have had Rivers of Blood already, and now the Flies are a coming, and so you will go on—Pray dissolve this wicked Bargain, and let the People go.

And whether wou'd you go now, said one of her Neighbours, you would but go into the Red Sea, and I doubt you have never a Moses to part the Waves for you—Come, come, good Wife, says her honest Neighbour, we have been often enough in the Red Sea, we have seldom been without a Sea of Blood when the two Nations have differ'd—We have had a Red Sea always on one side, and a Wilderness on the other, for my part I am for no more of it—And as to the Flies I am apt to think, 'tis a sign all the Jacobites and Enemies to the Succession will flye away and be gone like a shower, and fare them well, if they do not flye away, we shall have all our good times fly away.

Again, we find a lively Debate in the City, whether these Insects were High-Flyers, or Low-Flyers, some said one, some the other; at last one solv'd it to general Satisfaction, and said they were High-Flyers became Low-Flyers, and predicted from thence, the general fall of all sorts of High-Flying, that they would fall as a shower from the Air, and being deprived of all their volant Ca-

pacities, crawl in the Dirt and Dunghills of the streets; AMEN, said all the People with a shout, and a general Satisfaction appear'd in every one's Face at the Prediction; for really High-Flying and all its Concomitants, has been but like a Storm at Sea, an Accident to Nature, and as when ever the fury of the Wind withdraws, the Sea returns to its natural Calm and Smoothness; so, after all the Disturbance these High-Flyers, as they call them have made in the World, if they would but let us alone a while, all things would return to their native Calm, and the World would keep Holiday again.

Well, well, said a good honest Body, still, for all your jesting, these are odd things, and these Flies are but a kind of Vermine among us, that must signifie something; if it be only that they disturb the Peoples Minds they ought to be consider'd—The more like High-flyers still, said the other, for they like Vermine do continually disorder the Age, grow nauseous and disturb the People, and what must be done with them?—Truly, if I may give my Opinion let them alone, and say nothing to them, and they will like the Flies in this shower fall down, faint in their flight, and fall in the Dirt; they will scare the Children, and make a talk a while, but 'tis over and gone, and there's an End of them, they deserve no more Notice.

Well, but to what Publick Matter shall we liken this flying shower now? And how shall we do to beat it out of the Heads of our People, that it is not a Judgment from Heaven, sent to warn the Age of worse things a coming?

As to the looking on it as a Representation of Publick Matters, I am for making as many good Comparisons as you please—And will by no means hinder any Body that thinks seriously upon it—But if you will have me tell you what it signifies to the World at this time, I must confess, my Opinion is very short, just nothing at all, nor is there any thing at all Supernatural in it, nor any more than I have known more than once in other Places.

In order therefore to let you see that this is not so extraordinary, I shall give you my thoughts on it: There are in England, and I suppose in other Countries too, a very great quantity of Creatures call'd ANTS or *rispires*,

Pismires, these make their Nests in the Earth, raise little Hills on the Surface, which some call *Ant Hills*, other *Pissum Banks*, as the several Disasters of the Country direct.

These Creatures lay Eggs and increase abundantly, should the innumerable crowds of them remain from Year to Year, they would be an *Egyptian Plague* of themselves, but at a certain growth they are furnish'd with Wings, just as if it were a Direction to them to change their Habitation.

Being thus Equipp'd with Wings, and not very well us'd in the use of them, they observe however Nature's call, and at their Season away they fly, like the Bees in a swarm, but not at all directed like them in their flight, but seeking new Habitations, and their Multitude being unaccountably great, they grow weary, and pressing one another down by their own weight, when they begin to tire they fall like a shower.

I once knew a flight of these *Ants* come over the Marshes in *Essex*, in a most prodigious quantity, black like a Cloud; they began to fall about a Mile before they came to the *Thames*, and in flying over the *Thames* they fell so thick, that the Water was cover'd with them; I had two Servants rowing a small Boat over the River just at that time, and I believe near two Pecks of them fell into the Boat; they fell so thick, that I believe my Hatful came down the Funnel of two Chymnies in my House, which stood near the Rivers edge; and in proportion to this quantity, they fell for the Space as I could observe, of a half a Mile in breadth at least, some Workmen I employ'd then, said they spread two Miles, but then they fell not so thick—And they continued falling for near three Miles.

Any Body will imagine, the quantity must be prodigious that must thus come together; but if again they will observe the Multitude of those *Ant Hills*, and the Millions of the Creatures to be seen in them, they will cease to wonder.

Again, if we consider that as it is observ'd in this Letter, that when once they are fallen they never attempt to rise and fly again; 'tis very probable, they have flown as far and as fast as they are able, and Nature having given them Wings but just for the occasion, their Destruction is inevitable, for

first they have flown to the utmost of their strength, and cannot overtake their Fellows; And secondly, being scatter'd from their Army, they have no Discipline, they can betake themselves to no regular way of Livelihood, and so creeping up and down, desolate and alone, they die of meer Want and Hunger.

I have indeed sometimes thought, that Nature has seem'd in good Providence, and a kind of Husbandry to the World, to give these Creatures Wings, just as if it were to put them in a Condition to quit the Country, and make room for the next Generation; just as if it should speak to them and say, Come, you have lived your Season in the World, there's Wings for you, go fly away into the Sea, and drown yourselves, for the World cannot provide room for you and all your Progeny.

No Man I hope will be so prophane to say or think, that by this Allusion I lessen the Power of Omnipotence, as if, as one wisely expresses it, he had made more Creatures than he could maintain—But as there are several Creatures, who fulfill the Circulation of Life by the contrivance of Nature in a Year, so infinite Wisdom orders them to take as direct ways for their Exit, as they do for their Provision while here: Thus the Silk-worm in particular when it has spun its Delicate Web, has Wings bestowed upon it to fly, and is no more heard of; nor at all useful, and thousands of little Worms and Insects go the same way.

If any Man will ask me, how I know that these were *Ants* which thus fell on the City of *London*; I answer, I cannot say they were *Ants* at this distance, but I believe by the Description, they were; but if not, other sorts of Insects or Flies may take the same course, and the Consequence would be the same.

Again, 'tis to be Remark'd, that the time of these Insects Generating, corresponds exactly; for the Month of *July* is the Season, when those kinds of Creatures having brought their young up to perfection must either thrust them out of their Habitations for want of room, as the Bee, or leave them in their Habitations, and seek more room for themselves, as the *Ant*.

And